PROCESSION OF BLACKFOOT BRAVES

# POETIC MATTERS

A concerted abandonment of fixed forms (from sonnets to free verse), rhyme and metrical references cannot be considered anything but a formal change unless it is intrinsically correlative to a high degree of *deformation*, the term suggested by Gaston Bachelard in order to do away with the mistaken notion of "image making" or "image building" which conventional thought has ascribed to the word *imagination*. I cannot help agreeing with Bachelard that the imaginative faculty must be understood as *freeing us from the immediate images of perception* and in his words "without an unexpected union of images, there is no imagination, no imaginative action." He suggests the word "corresponding to imagination is not *image*, but *imaginary* .... that the value of an image is measured by the extent of its imaginary radiance." Now, it is incontrovertible (in accordance with Hegel's findings in *The Philosophy of Fine Art*) that the "*unfettered imagination*" is the basis for poetry, "imaginary content," its objectivity. Rigorously, imaginary power is central to poetic materialization which surrealism locates as a conduit for thought, speech being no more than a mediational instrument that imaginary thought transforms by the deforming of imagery.

But most American poets have mistakenly subordinated the imaginative faculty to the predominance of perception conjoining a slavish reduction of language to "speech patterns" and pragmatic usages. Bachelard characterizes an image which takes on a "definitive form" as assuming "present perception" ...such a "stable and completed image *clips the wings of the imagination*. It makes us fall from that dreaming imagination which does not confine itself within any image..."

The literary practitioners of the "post-Olson generation" as some promoters now label it) have been to a hopeless degree failures on the imaginative and lyrical planes of true poetry, preoccupied as they are with a self-conscious acquiescence to the debasement of language characterizing its reification by technicians and mind-managers of latter-day capitalism.* This direction is glorified specifically in those false poets who pride themselves on a formalized "handling" of "ordinary American speech" which is, in effect, nothing other than a rhetorical camouflage for the betrayal of poetic exigencies in the service of cultural chauvinism and the oppressive "reality principle," reflecting a pitiful need to be recognized by socially conditioned imbecility. Instead of poetry conceived as a disinterested means of emancipation— tending toward the realization of the objects of desire —we have Charles Olson, with misappropriated scientific jargon, reducing "the poem" to unqualified abstractions, "energy" and "energy-discharge," and pontificating the following inane dogma: "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception." Bachelard — scientist in poetry and psychologist of science, champion of Lautréamont and *active imagination* —has noted the crucial distinction between present perception and imagination. The following prescriptive revaluation may be critically situated in opposition to all aesthetic ideologies which shift the focus away from poetry's capacity and necessity for imaginative radiance: "To acquire a feeling for the imaginative role of language, we must seek, in every word, the

* Beyond the general deficiencies of the last thirty years, and outside of the surrealist movement, there are a number of exceptions known to me. Both morally and poetically, for example, there is Bob Kaufman pre-eminently; Gregory Corso, who can also be commended for his public disdain of "the Black Mountain School"; and Daniel Moore of *Dawn Visions*. All of these poets share the distinction of having, at certain times, expressed themselves honestly and intensely in a language with real affinities to surrealism.

desires for otherness, for double meaning, for metaphor... we must record all the desires to abandon what we see and what we say for what we imagine. We shall then have some chance of restoring to the imagination its role of attraction. To perceive and imagine are as antithetic as presence and absence. To imagine is to absent oneself; it is a leap toward a new life."

The vociferously alleged "newness" of post-World War II American poetry and poetics associated with Olson, Creeley, Ginsberg, Duncan, Levertov (among the most voluble practitioners and theorizers) pertains to nothing more than a belated "palace revolution" diverging only from the previous literary stranglehold by the fixed-form addicts, a priesthood of feudal minded English professors such as J. C. Ransom, Yvor Winters and R. P. Warren. The new literary priesthood found one of its main sources in Ezra Pound's glib slogan "Make it New", a recipe which has been actually translated into the advertising, architecture and designs of "the administered life" as we know it under monopoly capitalism and for which the inventor of futurism, Filippo Marinetti, by 1909, had sounded the exact intellectual tocsin.**

Like Marinetti, Olson posits unqualified "energy" and "the *kinetics* of the thing" as major technical preoccupations for composition. In fact, Marinetti's literary program seems to have resurfaced in Olson's reading of Pound, who asserted that the whole modern movement which he, T. S. Eliot and Joyce represented as a nucleus had its origins directly in Marinetti's futurism.

There is the curious fact of an aesthetic movement (Italian futurism) proclaiming extreme "novelty" and "dynamism" and all the while seminating, primarily through its founder, political "solutions" that found their end in fascism. At its origins futurism extolled war and extreme patriotism often expressed in organized mass demonstrations as well as in artistic productions; its political program, anti-parliamentarian and anti-socialist, consisted of a germinal theory of organizing the State and the economy which was largely realized later in Mussolini's Corporate State. The proposal that futurist artists and poets should rule society was, of course, less than fruitful. (Even Mussolini's belated appointment of Marinetti as cultural minister in the 1930s had no immediate significant effect on Italy.) However, the translation of certain futurist political proposals into central features of fascism does suggest the preponderant influence of the Marxian model of a "super-structural" ideology interacting on the infra-structure of Italian capitalism at crucially interstitial "moments" before and after World War I and extending considerably thereafter to finally determine a general aesthetic, by reduction and technical adaptations, in the architecture and stylizations which today throughout the world still resemble the futurist models. For it is *not* Picasso's influence, as alleged recently by some pundits of mass opinion, that is evident "all around us" in the contemporary civilized world. (If it were so, then where is the intense lyricism and super - reality represented by Picasso in his most important imaginative works between the two World Wars?) But the fact remains, we have reached the point in 1975 that the act of reading Ginsberg and Olson or any of their epigones is interchangeable with the scanning of *Time* and *Newsweek*. I maintain this is no "accident" but clearly delineates the *false consciousness of poetry* proliferating within the shifting gears of decadent capitalism.

Contrary to the consensus of American literary "authorities" who decided to separate Pound "the man" from "the poet," deploring his fascist politics and hailing his literary achievements, I believe Pound's poetics are as anti-human as his politics and, if his poetry is examined closely, considering the historical facts vis-a-vis Marinetti's futurism, it will be obvious to what extent the two currents interpenetrate. Fascism's claim to "revolution" by the cult of "youth" and "newness' while resuscitating the classicist values of Greco-Roman civilization and concretized, laughingly so, in the architecture known as "Mussolini modern," is a neat similitude to Pound's exclusive and scholastic insistence on Aristotelian logic and his aping of "the classics" while cinematically employing the linguistic idioms of a political ward heeler in the United States of the 1920s.

Charles Fourier rightly judged civilization to be the carrier of oppressive ideologies. In open hostility to the cancerous and moribund moral "values" exemplified in the bourgeois-academic "classics," surrealism prefers the great poetry of the primal peoples of the earth, and recognizes as well signs of revolt and liberty in the heretical, gnostic and heterodox developments in thought throughout the last three thousand years which significantly diverged from the judeo-christian and academic Greco-Roman traditions. I have always dreamed of the ultimate triumph of the legendary Sirens who, it was said, were "defeated" in their poetic combat with the Muses and who can be deciphered to typify imaginative freedom from the restraints of rationally controlled poetry whose spokesmen, like all good bourgeoisie, must always recommend that we "plug our ears" against the enchantresses heard by the inspired poet on his voyage to the unknown. The great nineteenth century painter, Gustave Moreau, must have known of the heterodox meaning of this legend, since he depicts the poet at the feet of the Siren, evoking her role as a sub-aqueous source of poetic inspiration, associating humanity's origin with water, which Sandor Ferenczi later found so psychoanalytically significant.

** During a sojourn in Rome (1964) I encountered a curious circle of old and young "friends of Marinetti" and became familiar with the substance of the Pound/Marinetti correspondence housed in a special archive. Thus I was able to acquire little-known facts concerning the futurist movement which, by way of explaining its "eclipse," certain of the "amici" hypothesized had as "enemy" none other than surrealism. Pound's fanatical pro-Italian posture corresponded, in fact, to Marinetti's proto-fascist and racist theory of Italian superiority over all other national groups based on the cultural "Genius" which, according to early futurist propaganda, was alleged to be a monopoly of the Italians (!). Finally, Pound's political position, as one of Mussolini's most prestigious supporters, culminated in his World War II radio broadcasts emphasizing permanent preferences for all things Italian over what Pound considered his own countrymen's inferiority and barbarism. During the Allied invasion of Italy, Pound could be heard over the radio soliciting American soldiers to surrender, invoking Italian cultural and political superiority as the main argument.

OJIBWA PICTOGRAPHS

It is not, as with Baudelaire, "plunging into the unknown" to find "the new," by which he who named imagination "the queen of the faculties" implied a path of *descent into oneself*, but, for the American versifiers, a consciously manipulated method of fragmenting reality by reduction to r a n d o m sensorial (primarily *retinal*) reporting and syntactic distortions suggesting a "newness" sought as an end in itself, much as reactionary versifiers of the late nineteenth century espoused "art for art's sake." Evading completely the primary problems of what it is that *informs content* in poetic practice, the emphasis on technical means which are often enough turned into ends, becomes a delusionary surface structure hiding the fact that poetry, in the sense understood by Hegel as "an act of unfettered imagination," is nowhere to be found. Instead we are given a whole new set of conventions replacing the old ones of rhyme and meter, but whether "projective verse," "cutups", "organic form," concrete poetry" or "songs à la rock 'n roll," these are merely another group of unmistakably petty "games" Rimbaud so rightly denounced in earlier counterparts and which surrealism has superseded. Just as boring as medieval litanists and "alliteratives," or the sonneteers of a few generations ago, the present "poem makers' come puffing and choking and creaking like the anthropomorphic caricatures of broken-down automobiles depicted in animated cartoons. The rottenness of these dichotomizing and alienating literary dogmas of the last twenty-five years should not fail to become more evident to others as the Surrealist Movement in the United States progresses to initiate a quantitatively determining *lever of revolution* on the cultural plane, since surrealism offers the sole challenge and viable alternative to what amounts to a conspiracy of poetic degeneracy in this country. Such degeneracy (with all its attendant implications) may be illustrated by a dialectical transposition of a recent Ginsberg book title, turning into "The *Fall of Poetry* in America." This "Fall" is the real *kinetic* activity of the post-Olson versifiers, as the mystificatory *poetry equals energy* identity is the reductionist predication of a psychological crisis with its roots in the alienated subject terrified by the repressed images he has successfully evaded during acts of composition.

Instead of words set free from the prosaic prisons of social reality, images transformed by desire, poetry freed from the "laws" of nature, attentive to the becoming of unknown analogies, words purified by the rays of oneiric desire, language emancipated from the confines of speech, informed by the inner ear and disdainful of "music" other than the rhythms immanent in imaginary thinking, analogies whose *encounters* elicit every type of humor — and instead of language becoming a means of infinite imaginary combinations — most established American poets of this century have given us a massive literature of sensibility, self-narration, virtuosity and literal confessions signed very energetically by the stylus of the death-wish.

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The only pleasure I can possibly derive from this necessary critique of the bankrupt tendencies in American pseudo-poetry is in proportion to the possibility of an effective *disruption* among the youth who are being oppressed by a programed set of misdirections and blind alleys projected in the schoolrooms whose categories evoke the names of n a u s e o u s adjuncts to bourgeois-bureaucratic culture. The most pernicious and mystifying tendency — and the more pronounced within the last decade — has been the application of the misnomers "surreal" and "surrealistic" to the *sham article*, causing the gravest difficulties among the uninformed and misinformed, a despicable practice which all authentic surrealists everywhere have always denounced. To affirm, for example, as some academician did recently, that "surrealism has become almost anything at all" since it is "the language our poets speak," not only is tendentiously flippant but more seriously represents the blatantly confusionist tactics of a whole gang of literati who have managed to do nothing better than dabble with the surface effects of genuine surrealist expression in order to proffer fake semblances which, for those of us in whom *individual discovery* is a matter of *sustained quest*, can elicit only our entire contempt.

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Surrealism rejects the scaffolding of the priesthoods of Literature and Art pompously sold in the commodity exchanges of schools and museums as "the Classics." Analogous to the bureaucratic mind of political domination is the literary one which comes crowing with its moribund "dominant tendencies," "the spirit of the times," and ejaculations of "talent" and "genius" to characterize this or that travesty of human potential. Rigidity, confusion and mystification, a stultifying provincialism, are the usual hallmarks of this parasitic literary charade played at the expense of any sign of disinterested and unqualified human freedom, for which these *respectable* gangs of the pimps of Literature and Art do their utmost to isolate, if not by a noisy confusionism, then by well known "conspiracies of silence" and scandal mongering. Each day there appear myriad articles, essays and other visible means of funneling the promotional lies concerning "reputations," "traditions," and the cabals of "masters" and apprentices of this or that coterie, wrapped in the guise of the inevitable "newness," the predictable fad and fashion perpetrated more than a hundred years since Rimbaud's lucid rejection of "the rotten game of two thousand years!" It is this same rotten game of aesthetic manipulators that pretends to close, except by a sneering recuperation, any insight into those who in the twentieth century carried incandescent and convulsive poetic activity by absolute signs of the Marvelous.

These are our immediate precursors. Samuel Greenberg was one of the most disquieting figures in the twentieth century, one whose great imaginative power is not in the least lessened for his having projected his Promethean reveries within the "romantic" idiom, thereby doubly offering us a glimpse of what is missing in late nineteenth century poetry in America, and gifting us with a view of perturbation and irrepressibility revealing the human condition as Kafka and Alfred Kubin had from other vantage points. Greenberg's tubercular illness is the other side of his salutary intelligence-of-the-heart that sounded, poignantly and radiantly, in poems that are veritable *wounds of wonder* transpiring in those last years of his approaching death in 1917, at age 23, from a bed in the "Sea View Hospital" on Staten Island, and *singing beyond it.*

With Mina Loy's *Lunar Baedeker* (1923) we encounter a singular flowering of what Hegel rightly announced to become *after him* the most fecund vehicle for poetic thought, in its specifically mythic function, and which Jacques Vaché located contemporaneously with Mina Loy's appearance, as *umor* — alternating her subtleties of wit between sensible convulsions in *darkest luminosity.*

In the 1920s Harry Crosby, a true dandy of explosively Promethean desire, left in *The Mad Queen* and elsewhere, signs of a "Sadean" magnanimity in the realms of mad love; before him, in America, perhaps none but Poe, in a few of his most "ectoplasmic" descents (and in the spirit of *Eureka*), comes to mind as purely comparable.

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As young as tomorrow, throwing its shadow over the moment's irrepressible desires, surrealism is at once what originated through certain historical confluences and astonishing discoveries (enhanced by what has evolved to this moment in systematic exploration and interpretations of the human condition), which came to the *foreground of consciousness* around 1920 in the minds of André Breton and a few of his friends who could assert not long after that they had indeed refound the long - sought "philosophers' stone," in the disinterested revolt of imaginative power capable of demolishing in one stroke any fixed notion of reality. A recent sign of surrealism's historical efficacy was noted where Breton suggested its *permanent birth* "in the genius of youth" who in May 1968 inscribed their watchword on the walls of Paris for all the world's eyes to register: *"All power to the Imagination!"*

Since Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* re-established these certain sources for poetry: *play, enigma* and *the hermetic*, we can all the more comprehend surrealism's consistent activation of these three zones of human expression, by liberating the unconditional and disinterested play of imaginary thought, revitalizing the enigmatic, and revealing the concealed. Ultimately, automatism's *raison d'etre* is the quest to reveal the latent content of human existence in its entirety.

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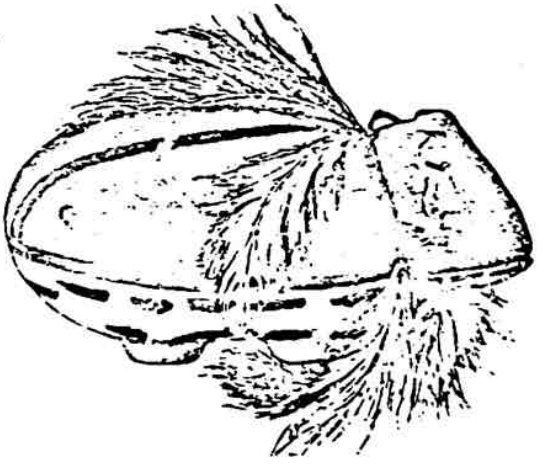
In Arizona I was privileged to witness a series of Hopi Indian ceremonies which suggest a *living myth* fulfilling Lautréamont's prophetic injunction of *"poetry made by all."* The Hopi *Katchina* Dancers' *symbolique* achieves a synthesis of primordial rhythms, imagery and symbolic iconography confluent with a linguistic-sonic structure collectively realized by the Masked Dancers and expresses, dynamically and visually, Hegel's definition of poetry as "the universal art." How much more satisfying is this exalting experience of collective imaginative activity, in the Hopi's peculiar synthesis of all "the arts" and rooted in a vast complex of cosmological ideas, than all the moribund mythologies and moral pretensions associated with the reified Greco-Roman classical authors.

The Hopi's vital imagery, at once magical-convulsive, became for me a veritable moving vehicle of the Poetic Marvelous, transporting me straight to those regions in the mind surrealism has always exalted. Here among a people who have retained a high degree of poetic expression in a cohesive collective form, I was made aware of a complementation of those structures, reuniting dream and concrete reality, past and present, rational and irrational, which surrealism aspires to set into free operation on the *social plane*, and suggesting analogous elements of the "new myth" surrealism has evaluated in our present civilization during the fifty years of its intrusion as a revolutionary matrix. It has become obvious that surrealism exists as a permanent means toward initiating a completely *new sensibility and civilization,* playing a role in the world communist societies of the future comparable to the festivals of living myth associated with "primitive communism" though, of course, uniquely rooted in the mythico-marvelous elements revealable in our own cultures and on another turn of the spiral of humanity's evolution through the revolutionary destruction of all alienating systems. Instead of a fragmentation of the poetic principle and suppression of its sensibility generally, as in present-day global societies, surrealism's annunciation of its *rendezvous with history* constitutes the necessity for the infinite widening of the structure of *poetry made by all* beyond its minoritory practice in surrealist groups, extending the concrete universality of surrealism's vital myth through which a permanent revelation of humanity shall become a *new way of life.*



ZUNI HUNTING FETISH

## NOTES TOWARD A RIGOROUS INTERPRETATION OF SURREALIST OCCULTATION

Only in the moral certitude of vanquishing what resists the restoration of a blazing crown to a headless voice at the rites of permanent transgression and at the demarcation of the elected sacral site, where starlight is made to trace the initial human footprints, shall we witness the supersession of the habitual apparatus set up by external administration. Meanwhile, there remains the ongoing, permanent necessity of criticizing as well the pernicious other-side of the conformist coin constituting the many pseudo-revolts, cultural dispersals and mystifications proliferating these days at a rate proportional to their assimilation and recuperation by the general administration. The spirit that may be permanently invoked and instigated is one of *partisan affinities* whose shields and arsenals are forged from invariable principles of liberating expression to be realized entirely on their own terms, and whose movement in the field against the superstructural obstacles must continue to be one of *implacable distance* and *distancing*, to appear as magically tempting as the Medusa, impenetrable as an interplanetary Behemoth and as resoundingly hostile to recuperation as any original violation of language.

* * *

Of labyrinths there are none more formidable, it seems to me, than those which *ensorcell* while extending like those "waves of snakes" whose variations multiply as one reads a mile of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs — mazes that bewitch, I say, at the seemingly inverted pyramid whose apex reaches the heart as the sinuous path of seduction unravels, variably slow and quick, in the mind of love, in the psychic atmosphere, that is, of one who would grasp the dialectic interstices of *a moment and eternity*, each transcending the other, the horizon a steady fluidic flame, the constant quivering of desire, the "volatile" *going-over* to the "fixed" chambers about to dissolve into materialized secrets, a winged sphinx dilating whose extremities become blazing words! Actions, being-in-becoming, are explosively recognized as intrinsic to the language of "the traditional sciences," *the gesture which is transmutation:* that is, a "heightening" of immanent powers, forces and structures. (This perspective coincidentally is worth borrowing as an "occult lever" and set afloat in that area surrealism is privileged to reveal: "a wave of dreams," the "perfect moment" of the Marvelous and toward Breton's "...of the mind in neutral gear...").

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When I think of the lofty (and loftily *researched*) findings of the great philosopher Hegel as to the nature of poetic logic, its unity encompassing all the directions of human thought, and I am reminded of a few of us who have begun to practice what amounts to a collective restoration of the powers of poetic unity and as we appear, historically together intervening on the plane of American "culture" with *all the chips stacked against us*, situated against the monstrous shadow of "the new poetry" and another obscurantism of the students of those moribund minds that the false vanguards alleged to displace, I know that only armed with the living perspectives of surrealism, incarnated in *Arsenal*, am I permitted to make distinctions, draw up a relentless criticism and inveigh against those crimes now being committed against the human spirit by mystifiers, fabricators of confusion, and all our detractors, in the certainty that my comrades and I shall not fail to be heard over and beyond, if even below, the current babble and noise of the sickening purveyors of literary and aesthetic darkness.

* * *

What is proposed ultimately and permanently: the Promethean gesture, the gesture that supersedes the cultural commodity, "the author," "the artist," "the poet," and dialectically subsumes these vain and masochistic inventions of our elders, the obnoxious enemies of desire and human freedom, who are parasitically ranged around and within us. In this pursuit we continue Rimbaud's program of the seer, who *listens* for the unheard-of, that is, the absolute becoming of what we are yet not free from, what we have yet to conquer, to supersede, namely this "tyrant" of cultural habituation, the sniveling dog of heritages, and deeper, the chattel-slave of atavism: the repressive patriarchal family structure. With Rimbaud, we must conceive of the Great Adventure as going ahead of action; we "steal fire," fire which is alchemically, psychologically, metabolically, erotically, the sole source, origin, lever, pivot — the libidinal principle itself. It is from the transformations of *libido* that desire takes wing and the cultural producer and product are essentially transcended for a phoenix-like rebirth of what shall become, of *what shall be*. Herein rest the secret correspondences, by immanent revelation, of our most profound "self" and all others; herein I discern surrealism as an organism transcending the aggregates of which it is composed; here I witness the full flowering of each individual personality by a permanent annihilation of the interior slavocracy, the becoming of that resolution; by mediations of psychical exaltations and unconditional inspiration, of the Hegelian master-slave contradiction. Otherwise I risk the mediocrity of being but another "artist" or "poet" producing what shall not bear in its secret core — but only "secret" for those who have not known the power of self-transcending desire — the flower of fire Prometheus sublimates out of his desire of desire, that is, SUBLIMES from the libidinal fire transformed by psychical powers, the highest source of conscious desire to unleash the buried treasures, so that we may pass back and forth, masters of consuming and preserving fire!

Let us not forget that the Promethean pathways are uniquely *vital* as opposed to the programs of saints, contemplatives, artists, anti-artists, philosophers, and anti-philosophers, merely *outdistanced* categories for those who insist on the priorities of *the mad lover of freedom, the masterless master and the poetic criminal!*

(To Be Continued)

Philip LAMANTIA